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Title:

Habits and orders of everyday life: commensal adjustment in Anglo-French couples

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Habits and orders of everyday life: commensal adjustment in Anglo-French couples

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Abstract

This paper examines processes of habit reshuffling and change in different contexts of household formation, looking specifically at habits regarding eating and commensality. It is based on a study of 14 couples, each with one English and one French partner, half of whom live in France, half in England. We examine the interplay between partners, their determination to eat together as a couple, and the various 'orders' associated with their commensal pact (diets, routines, extra-marital commensality), both when they start as couples and as parents of young children. We draw on the specificity of cross-national couple experience to cast light on processes of adjustment – to one another, and to the new country of residence for the migrant partner. In particular, we explore the potential of notions of 'split' and 'solid' 'patrimonies of incorporated habits', 're-shuffling' of habits and dispositions, and 'habit memory', to characterise the dynamics of habits at play in each of the orders under scrutiny. Overall, the paper contributes to the analysis of habit as the 'stuff' of orders of everyday life.

Keywords: commensality, cross-national couples, England, France, habits, meals, order of everyday life, sociability, table, temporal routines

1 Introduction

This paper explores mechanisms of persistence and change in eating patterns in households containing partners of different national origin. It is based on a study of 14 couples, each with one British and one French partner, half of whom live in France, half in the United Kingdom. It adds to previous studies of new couples which have charted the formation and change of eating habits and tastes, as living in common involves setting up at least a partly common routine, particularly the sharing of meals (Craig and Truswell 1994; Worsley 1988; Kemmer et al 1998; Marshall and Anderson 2002; Bove, Sobal and Rauschenbach 2003). Young couples are keen to form what Sobal and colleagues called a 'commensal unit', a particular formation in their 'commensal career' (Sobal, Bove and Rauschenbach 2002). This will often involve significant personal readjustments. Because eating depends on food selection and its bodily incorporation, the setting up of meal occasions, and processes of social interaction surrounding consumption (Warde 2013), each of which is a potential source of unease and discomfort, eating together requires negotiation and accommodation. Jean-Claude Kaufmann's studies have cast light on dynamics of mutual adjustment in couples by interpreting it as interplay between two 'patrimones of incorporated habits' and associated dispositions (Kaufmann 1994). It is upon the link between the creation of a 'commensal unit' in the instance of couple formation and what happens with habits in that context that we focus. Through this analysis, we hope to cast new sociological light on the dynamics of habit for orders of everyday life.

Conceptualising habit, habitus and habit memory

Habit is a difficult sociological object (Crossley 2013). Nevertheless, it has enjoyed a recent revival thanks to practice theoretical approaches to consumption which have sought to re-

balance the study of consumption towards the analysis of the ordinary, inconspicuous and routine (Gronow and Warde 2001; Marshall 2005; Warde and Southerton 2012). As Charles Camic showed in a classic article, habit used to be an important sociological notion, linked to the notions of regularity, order, and social change. Indeed Emile Durkheim had seen in habits the stuff of everyday relationships and therefore of the moral fabric of society (Camic 1986: 1057). For Max Weber, conformity with what is 'habitual, what is familiar, what one is brought up to do, what constantly recurs' is the main foundation for the continued validity of an order of social relations, and, against what we might expect, '*precisely* of a "rational" order' (Weber 2012: 300).

Habit, thus, can be seen as connecting social patterns, conventions and orders with everyday experience – especially embodied experience and feelings. Whilst the notion of habitus also allows us to think through how social relations and conventions become inscribed in bodies and thus naturalised, it tends to blackbox the operation of inscription itself. 'Habits' precisely designate the patterns of our everyday lives in very embodied terms, especially pointing to recurring sequences of courses of action, associated with specific bodily postures, gestures and emotions. Such an understanding of habit was particularly developed in the context of the study of social habits and collective rituals by Paul Connerton in his excellent book, *How Societies Remember* (1989). There Connerton related 'social habit' to collective performances, and referred to habits as 'patterns of body use become ingrained through our interactions with objects' in the context of 'continuously practised activity' (1989: 94). Performance relates bodies, objects and spaces: habits designate the bodily inscription of these bundles of relations and their sequence, whilst performance designates their enactment. Importantly for our analysis in this paper, Connerton further defined habit memory as the result of that process of inscription, whereby 'postures and movements which are habit memories become sedimented into bodily conformation' (ibid.).

Partly building on Connerton's work, Jean-Claude Kaufmann (1994), in the context of a study of couple formation and the construction of a shared domestic order, proposed a different usage of habitus and habits. Discarding the distinction between individual and social habits, he offered a reading of identity as the attempt to work with one's own 'patrimony of incorporated habits' and give it some consistency. Comparing habitus and habit, he noted that habitus seeks to chart the relations between externality and interiority, which then suggests a direct translation of social classifications into features of identity. By contrast, habit designates the patterning of embodied experience and its composition and re-arrangement in the negotiations of everyday interaction. Drawing critically on Erving Goffman's notion of 'interaction order', 'a substantive order in its own right' (Goffman 1983: 2), Kaufmann suggested that the patterning of embodied experience was mediated, and that such mediation, taking place in the order of interaction, had to be studied as such. Such a conception of habits would, he surmised, allow for 'a better account [of] the contradictions, uncertainties, and the dynamic of identity construction' than habitus (1994: 319). Beyond the relevance of such notion for analyses of identity construction, we propose to extend Kaufmann's and Connerton's definitions of habit by considering it as the more or less labile 'stuff' of social practices, orders and conventions, implying a conception of habitus which connects and assigns habits relationally to the social space of positions.

Kaufmann (1994:324) sees couple formation as a moment of negotiation and re-activation of 'incorporated habits'. He views the effect of the couple encounter on the 'incorporated schemes' of each partner as one of 're-shuffling' or 're-arrangement' (*recomposition*) through the process of socialisation at play in the couple, rather than as a rupture. More specifically Kaufmann argues that the reshuffling of incorporated habits occurs as each partner discovers her- or him- self anew and discovers the other anew as well in the structuring of a domestic unit after the initial phase of encounter. In that process, the selective reactivation of dormant habits in one partner leads to adjustments in the other partner's own incorporated habits

(Kaufmann 1994: 320). This is possible not only because there might be a willingness to adjust one's habits to create a shared household, but because partners each themselves have conflicting sets of habits, corresponding to different 'frames' and contexts of experience. According to Kaufmann, 'splits' in incorporated habits make for inventive, though difficult, 'work' in the creation of the domestic unit (Kaufmann 1994: 323). The partner acts as a more or less unconscious teacher, revealing and reviving latent habits through interaction, which Kaufmann calls the 'Pygmalion effect'.¹ This is doubly relevant for understanding processes of adjustment in cross-national couples: as we have suggested elsewhere, not only the partner but also the broader context of relations in the new country of residence might exert a Pygmalion effect on the relocating partner, and through activation of dormant tastes and habits (Darmon and Warde 2016: 712).

Couples and adjustment

In this paper we examine processes of reshuffling and change in eating habits in different contexts of household formation. Constructing a commensal unit involves attempting to set up shared or at least agreed dietary patterns, to follow mutually compatible temporal routines, and to take part together, on occasion, in the rituals of wider sociability. These patterns, routines and rituals order habits in particular ways. In adjusting to each other, and, for the migrant partner to life in another country, admittedly rather close culturally, with which of these dimensions of commensality did new couples find most difficult? This question matters not only to understand dynamics of habit and change in moments of biographical transition, but also, more theoretically, to cast light on the dynamic of habits in different types of order – dietary, temporal, and sociability-related.

There are many studies of family arrangements for eating and many more of the impact of migration, but fewer than might be anticipated about these processes in cross-national couples. Cross-national couples seem especially suited for understanding identity reshuffling and the symbolic negotiations at play within couples and in partners' relationships with

relatives and friends. This is in part because they have to render their surprises and difficulties more explicit than same country couples, but also, in the case of European cross-national couples, because they enjoy joking about (and reflecting upon) their perceived differences and especially those of their entourages. We look at breaks, unhappiness, disruptions, disappointments, and perceptions of error or incompetence, as indications of a latent tension or a more open conflict between habits and dispositions and their consequences for reshuffling.

In what follows we examine three dimensions of the commensal pact (diets, routines and extra-marital commensality) between partners in Anglo-French couples, both as starting couples and as parents of young children. For each dimension we select a few episodes from their experiences to illuminate processes of adjustment – to one another, and to the new country of residence for the migrant partner. We employ concepts of ‘split’ and ‘solid’ ‘patrimonies of incorporated habits’, the ‘re-shuffling’ of habits and dispositions, and ‘habit memory’. We are concerned less with identity construction in couples and more with the dynamics of habits in the dietary, temporal and sociability orders of eating.

2 Data and methods

We recruited 14 Anglo-French couples, seven in a metropolitan area in Northern England and seven in the Ile de France region. We initially sought couples with less than six years of common life on the grounds that might still remember adjustments at the beginning and yet be able to say something about their evolution once the relocating partner felt settled. However, it proved hard to find willing couples with the very specific characteristics required for our project.² We also came to appreciate from early interviews just how significant having a child is for family eating arrangements. We therefore relaxed the criterion to encompass

couples both with and without children.³ Couples were contacted through work networks, the Alliance Française websites in England and social fora for expatriates in France and we also resorted to snow-balling procedures.⁴ None of the persons interviewed was known to us previously.

We first interviewed couples together about their current eating habits; how these had been arrived at; the food story of their encounter; accounts of changes since they were together; how their habits compare with those of friends and relatives; and their plans for the future. Wherever possible follow-up interviews then took place with the relocating partner on her or his history of eating habits and trajectory of migration and how this had affected eating habits. This interviewing strategy is well justified by Valentine (1999) and we described the practicalities further elsewhere (Darmon and Warde 2014). Conducted by a bi-lingual interviewer (Darmon), some interviews were in English, some in French, and some oscillated between both languages. Some were conducted at the interviewee's workplace, but most were in their homes. Interviews were recorded, fully transcribed and coded using NVIVO. The specific spatial features of the areas of recruitment have only marginal relevance for the comparison undertaken.

Table I – Characteristics of the interviewees

	England	France	Total
Couple type			
British man, French woman	5 (of which 1 with children)	3 (of which 1 with children)	8
British woman, French man	2 (of which 1 with children)	4 (all with children)	6
Duration of relationship			
Less than 6 years together	4	4	8
More than 6 years together	3	3	6
Total	7	7	14

3 Results

3.1 Becoming a couple: the commensal pact and dietary adjustments

Making arrangements to eat together is one of the most fundamental and general facets of setting up a new household in Western societies. The importance of commensality for couples and families is widely recognised (eg DeVault, 1991; Kemmer et al 1998; Sobal et al 2002;

Bove et al 2003; Marshall and Anderson 2002). It thus comes as no surprise that all our interviewees could, even a few years after the event, report on their own experience of initially establishing commensal eating arrangements. They did so all the more readily perhaps as dietary adjustment is more explicit for mixed couples than for those of the same nationality. Having been brought up in different countries, each partner sees himself or herself as the bearer of more markedly different 'patrimonies of incorporated habits' and mutual interest in each other's cultures possibly translates into a keener verbalisation of differences.

Confirming the findings of previous studies (Craig and Truswell 1994; Worsley 1988; Kemmer et al 1998; Marshall and Anderson 2002; Bove et al 2003), we found that most couples deal with their differences in habits by fostering compromise and complementarity in what we call their commensal pact. One strategy was to alternate cuisines between weekdays and the week-end. Each cook distinctly adopted a different repertoire of recipes, thus widening the range of cuisines and dishes for both. Another ploy was to add formerly liked items to a dish so as to share the basics of the dish and customise it to the tastes of each partner, for example where the non-vegetarian partner adds ham to a vegetarian dish, or where the spice-reluctant partner adds cream to a curry dish to soften it. Thus everyday household meals – in contrast with more constrained settings, such as dining with the family in law – permit the establishment of patterns which allow for both experimentation and customisation for comfort (Yang 2010).

'Habit memory' of varied and contrasted cooking and eating habits in earlier periods of their lives or in different food environments facilitated such adjustments and endowed interviewees with a sense of the familiar, despite the strangeness of the other's ways: consistent and uniform dietary habits are likely to be rare due to exposure to different food environments in one's family, at school, at the grand-parents' homes, at friends' places, etc. during childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. Contrasted experiences of foods and commensality have been cherished for different reasons and have become entrenched. These different experiences of oneself as eater then become dormant pending new and different situations.

In other words, 'patrimonies of incorporated habits' can be 'strong and consistent', but they are much more likely to be 'split' (Kaufmann 1994: 323).⁵

Chloe (22, student, lives in England with Alexander) was surprised by the tastes and expectations of her foodie companion and his circle of friends. Where she and her student flatmates in Paris had been concerned with having a 'bellyful of something', she was now meeting 'young people who are really passionate about cooking'. She was seduced by her boyfriend's taste for homemade, fresh food. His vegetarianism, which she did not completely follow, nevertheless resonated with memories of monthly journeys back from her grandparents' house in the Vendée with the car boot full of rhubarb, chards and sorrel (all of which she tastes again in the UK). Eating at her grand-parents had felt very different to all of her other eating experiences – be it the canteen, at a neighbour's ('it wasn't always very good at all'), or indeed family dinners at home where nearly everything was made from tins and frozen foods:

'yeah that was strange because ... my grandmother buys everything fresh, but... my mother, by contrast, she really must be from the "frozen food generation", she never really takes the time to go to the market because she is working...'

Family dinners had been a highly pleasurable moment full of laughs and intimacy with her parents and brother, but this was quite independent from the taste of the foods. The routine of eating was instrumental – for feeding, and as a vehicle for sociability with family and friends. This was not an unusual experience among our French respondents – indeed it was rather the rule. Whilst the routine of sharing meals, whether at work or in the family, was often treasured, memories of family meals often reported on plain, simple food, or even a rather hasty and convenient affair when both parents were working. This sets out the sojourns in Vendee as the exception, associated with fresh and pungent tastes, and cherished by the whole family (hence the boot full of rhubarb, cooked into compotes by Chloe's father – his only culinary contribution to the household). The fond memories of such exception, and the

renewed encounter with tastes of fruit and vegetables of the West coast of France in her new country of residence, disposed Chloe well toward a foodie commensal pact with Alexander. Nevertheless, this also had implications in terms of the organisation of time, as cooking was of essence. Converting the status of 'cooking from scratch' from exception into the new routine represents a step not without tensions. Whilst her dominant pattern of habits in France had been marked by the established routine of three meals a day, the demands of cooking from scratch mean that the number of meals with Alexander is reduced to two a day – a routine to which Chloe found it very difficult to adjust.

The hierarchy between inscribed habits thus matters. Although eating habits are usually not organised into 'strong and consistent', or solid, patrimonies, their fluidity is only relative and their sequence and relation to each other, for example in patterns setting out the everyday versus exceptions, also counts. Kaufmann's important hypothesis about the dynamic character of habits, does not mean that he discards the stable inscription of such contrasts and differentials. This is well captured by the notion of 'split' patrimonies of incorporated habits, where latent and prevalent patterns are in conflict in an individual's identity construction. If we take distance from an analysis in identity terms, and rather look at the dynamic of habits in the dietary order of eating, then contrasts between sets of habits may better be phrased not as prevalent and latent, but as everyday and exceptional. When the latent becomes prevalent, exception and its transformation into the everyday makes for both creative adjustment and tension.

Patrimonies of incorporated habits may also be split via biographical ruptures, with diachronic, rather than synchronic contrasts between concurring sets of habits. The new arrangements in the new country of residence may revive memories of banished habits, creating tensions and dynamics of a different nature than in the case above.

Romain (30, mature student, lives in England with Rebecca), has poor memories of his diet as a child. His sister and himself still joke about the '(canned) ravioli and peas' that formed

most of their meals whilst they were growing up, as their mother was a single-parent on very low income. At 17 Romain left school and started an apprenticeship contract in a local gastronomic restaurant. As he had to eat and drink what was on the menu, his tastes were transformed. He still remembers the first dish he was presented with, 'lapin à l'orléanaise', the beginning of a new era! His encounter with Rebecca, in France, was enmeshed with the joys of introducing her to newly cherished dishes and wines. He then followed her to her hometown and the three following years were 'miserable'. He barely spoke English, worked in all sorts of jobs with quite some time at HMV and Next. He was shocked that there was no cafeteria in his workplaces and that he had to go out for a very short break, on the cheapest sandwich menu, which always comes with crisps. This (and the feeling of being locked in a deprived neighbourhood) must have echoed with his life as a child and teen-ager, which he had so resolutely put behind. He 'took his revenge' in the evenings: for three years, he cooked for Rebecca and himself, and he cooked 'French' – elaborate French; thus acting out in tension, so to speak, the dietary contrast between two radically opposed periods of his life. Rebecca and Romain eventually moved to another suburb, less isolated and well provided in laid-back restaurants. The tension lessened as Romain took up studying again and his fellow students introduced him to Vegetarian cafes and restaurants. Eventually he left cooking dinner to Rebecca.

In this case, the new dietary provision in the new surroundings of everyday life re-activated memories of discarded habits whose revival was painful. Romain's split patrimony of incorporated dietary habits thus did not make for smoother adjustment, but rather seems to have heightened the extreme tension between feelings of isolation and entrapment reminiscent of earlier difficult days and the obstinate maintenance of hard-won cherished habits. In this case, as in the previous one, it is not habit memory only which is enacted, but the contrast and tension between two sets of such memories which underpin the evolving commensal pact between Romain and Rebecca.

3.2. Eating together routinely

Like the young Scottish couples studied by Marshall and his colleagues, the cross-national couples included in our study tended to adopt more organised ways of eating than when they were single. Establishing a shared routine for meals mattered a lot to them, especially for dinner and at the week-end (Marshall and Anderson 2002: 204, Marshall 2005: 81). Switching from student to working status may already have given rise to a more organised meal pattern, but the need to adjust this new pattern with that of the partner makes organisation more imperative. Sharing a meal routine can even be said to be at the heart of the establishment of a domestic order, more so than dietary adjustment, as this inscribes the couple, and much more clearly so, the family, in the institutionalised temporal organisation of collective times.

Such adjustments are not only more explicit in cross-national couples, they also have more stakes attached to them, as our respondents tended to look upon the temporal order of meals as a cultural norm difficult to derogate, unaware of their only historically recent stabilisation (Grignon 1996). Thus Richard, who lives with Christelle in a city of Northern England, could not conceive of long lunch breaks in which colleagues would share a meal ('nobody would go to the restaurant for lunch here, no-one!'), taking the rather recent generalisation of short lunch breaks and light lunches in England (Southerton 2009, Yates and Warde 2015) as the go-without-saying rule. The strength of feeling in his exclamation reappeared moments later in the interview, when Richard laughed over narrating the meal schedule at his parents in law's, as well as at other family or friends' places in France, where Christelle and he spend much of their holiday.

Richard – I mean I like to sleep in the morning, especially when I'm on holiday so... If I wake up and the breakfast table is cleared, it's too late, there's no breakfast [laughs]

Christelle – But we don't have to have our breakfast together, basically there's a table, and people will have breakfast maybe on their own, there's a table and...

Richard – Depends what time they're getting up...

Christelle – But after a certain time, the breakfast table will eventually be cleared, because people are already cooking for the lunch...

Richard – Preparing lunch yeah.

Christelle – You won't get hungry [for lunch] if you have breakfast at 11, or half 11 and we eat at 12.

Richard – So yeah so if you miss the sort of sitting breakfast, you have to wait til your lunch really [laughs].

Richard went on to disparage the 'rigidity' of 'French' meal times, the vigour of his reaction epitomizing the importance for him of the informality of meals, and, at least in his interpretation, the British manner. To him, meal time and duration, whether for breakfast or for lunch, should be subordinated to other activities – work, during the year, and rest, during vacations. By contrast, meals are more central to the schedule of his French relatives and friends, across work and holiday time. Indeed, with regard to the temporal order of meals, 'solid patrimonies of incorporated habits' are in evidence, entrenched by institutionalised ways of organising collective life. In the main, meal times matter as such in France and infringements to the norm are felt as a nuisance, whereas the temporal order of meals tends to be subjected to that of work and leisure to a greater extent in England. In this respect, Richard's exhortation to his family in law to make an exception to family mealtime rules, during the holiday fell on deaf ears, and while he gladly submitted to his mother in law's cuisine, the temporal dimension constituted a real, and revealing, sticking point.

However Richard and Christelle, like most of our respondents without children, found meeting ground for their commensal pact: lunch, which depends in part on institutional and

organisational provision, is 'English' per force – at least in the sense that neither of them would go out every day for lunch with colleagues. Dinner, and indeed dinner time, is mostly 'French' (although while what is deemed French and English varies among our respondents, French invariably meant late, or, at least, later than English). Most Anglo-French couples without children tended to eat 'late', either because of work and wanting to cook, or to uphold a 'French' or 'continental' standard. That standard is felt keenly by French partners, and most English partners are usually quite willing to accommodate it, for what late dinner is associated with – aperitif, a cooked dinner, or making dinner the key moment for being together in the evening. Such readiness to demand the implementation of the standard and such willingness to submit to it may also be spurred by the association of late dinners with partying and dining out, and by the feeling that living with a French partner and adopting 'French' meal times had a 'cool' air to it – turning couple making into a prolonged celebration, a suspended time of no family obligation, or not yet. For Richard, a late dinner felt like 'being at the restaurant every night', thereby displaying a hedonic disposition which alternated with his more instrumental handling of food during the day.

The English lunch and French dinner compromise, however, means that Anglo-French couples residing in England typically have to cope with a gap between the light lunch and the late dinner. Such gaps testify to couples' commitment to uphold different cherished norms, but nevertheless require some material backing and adjustment to avoid sensations of hunger. This, in Richard and Christelle's case, is made possible by adjusting breakfast and thanks to the workplace arrangements for lunch; Richard's cereals or porridge fare him up until lunchtime, and even later, whereas Christelle heats up the left-overs from the previous dinner at work, which though not making up for the much regretted sociability of French work lunches, nevertheless ensures that lunch was a dish rather than a sandwich.

In some couples no such variable of adjustment was found and the gap created between an English lunch and a French dinner time gave rise to sensations of hunger and dissatisfaction

with the commensal pact. A light and brief lunch is well matched with an earlier dinner, and problematic gaps between the supposed and actual distribution of meals brought back memories of another organisation of time. Furthermore, sensations of hunger seemed to testify to a tuning of one's body to such previous organisation (as we saw above with Chloe). Indeed, as argued by Kristensen and Holm (2006) and illustrated in our earlier analysis of eating practices in France and the UK (see Darmon and Warde 2014), de-institutionalisation of the temporal arrangements of the working day, in particular collective lunch provision through workplace cafeterias, turns the body into a site for inner regulation. However, here we highlight a peculiar mechanism of embodied habit memory, which operates in temporal disjunctures. This offers a way of supplementing Connerton's notion. Habit memory is not only actualised through the 'sedimentation' of repeated performance but it also calls to mind (and body) *differentials* through contrasts with another pattern of performance. This will be confirmed in the next section, where sociability again unveils the operation of differential habit memory, through contrast between present and past embodied performance, rather than through repetition.

Having children, and especially having children of school age, means tuning in to their time, and thus to school time. This, whether in France or in England, invariably means eating dinner earlier. Possibilities of compromise are curtailed as institutionally conditioned times largely took over, in both countries. The temporal order then becomes definitely 'stickier', and there is no alternative but to subject to it. As with dietary adjustments, such subjection sometimes calls on latent dispositions, making it less onerous. For Frédéric, for example, who switched to dinners at quarter to six with his wife and two daughters when the elder one started to go to school, this was the major change in his eating habits with regard to couple life and life in France. However he was happy with it: 'I think it's really good actually, because you go to bed with an empty stomach and this is better for digestion. And I'm really hungry at half past five so that's fine. And also, yes, to eat together'. This might be read as a post-fact justification of

a schedule that was largely imposed on the family by an institutional environment they do not control. However, other parents have their children eat first and have a dinner together later. So, whilst the shared family dinner was clearly important, a healthier lifestyle mattered to Frédéric and was becoming part of a life project.

The examples of both Richard and Frédéric suggest that the shift from one convention to another (from 'French' to 'English' dinner time, and vice versa), and the teaching of oneself new habits, feels easier when experienced as a way of actualising one's own latent dispositions, as a choice corresponding to a self-imposed rule and life project, whether hedonic (late dinners) or health oriented (early dinners).

3.3 Eating and drinking in company: adjusting to conventions of sociability

Moving beyond the initial encounter means finding one's way with the other's circles of family and friends and adjusting to the conventions of sociability in these contexts. Commensality with in-laws especially has high stakes for any newly formed couple, as boundaries between one's own unit and parents' home have to be 'negotiated' (Sobal et al. 2002: 389). Stakes are likely to be higher again for cross-national couples, as commensality with kin and friends constitutes an important part of the migrant partner's social integration in their new place of residence.

We report on a specific, highly conventionalised, aspect of the arrangements for extra-marital commensality – the greater or lesser centrality of the table and the kind of gestures and embodied habits it demands and triggers. The table governs conventional spaces of sociability configured by such aspects as distance from it and the possibility of movement, how it is set, and even the kind of conversations it affords. It epitomises greater or lesser formality (Chevalier 2002). Variations in both countries are marked by the social occasion as well as, very clearly, by class, while also soliciting more specific accounts of bodily experience.

The very different role of the table in commensality with kin appears very clearly in the account of Rachel, who lives in France with Cedric and their baby daughter. She comments on sociable gatherings with her husband's parents (each divorced and remarried) and then in her own family back home:

As soon as we're together it's all centred round food and drink; so we'll have an aperitif... And then the rest of the evening is at the table. Whereas in England we would sit round in the living room, we'd have our drinks, we'd then go to the table, we'd have dinner, we then go back to the living room and we'd have maybe a few more chats or finish our glass of wine, or maybe have a glass of brandy or something. Here we would move to the table and the table is the last place we'll be; so the meal will go on for quite a while. But then we would never move back to the sofa and sit and have another drink together, it always takes place at the table; and then Cedric will say something like, 'Oh, well, we should get the baby home', and up we go and we leave from the table. But then everyone kind of does.

This account was corroborated by other respondents. Overall the table plays a much more functional and specific role in English sociability compared with an all-encompassing, integrative and continuous role in France. Whereas childhood memories of family dinners in England did involve sitting at the table, wider commensality with kin did not: the table was used for placing the dishes of the cold buffet (a frequent format for the family gatherings of our English respondents), from which anyone could help themselves – but not to sit down to. Mary Douglas (1972) showed how the presence of the table marked boundaries of sociability in England, with invitations for a meal being reserved for close kin, whilst other gatherings took place around drinks. The 'multiplication of tables' alluded to by Kaufmann (2010: 87), pointing to an increase in the variety of modes of food sociability, means that further distinctions can be made; the buffet table lies between the meal table and no table. Gatherings with kin and close friends would often take place under such format in England. Absence of habit and felt

lack of competence for sitting at the table for a meal is sometimes keenly felt by English respondents, and, particularly, observed among the English relatives and friends whom they invite to their French homes. Taking them to the restaurant was a pragmatic way to avoid embarrassing situations, but inventiveness is also involved in finding dishes that combine sitting at the table with relatively free movement, and which do not entail being cooked for. For these reasons 'Raclette' was a popular dish.⁶

Conversely, the table is much missed by some French respondents living in England. Frédéric and Gemma, who live with their two small daughters in a city in the North of the country and who had lived together for a while in France beforehand, tried to continue the ways of sociability that Frédéric so enjoyed and that Gemma had got to appreciate as well. However, they are forced to acknowledge their lack of success, when friends repeatedly fail to turn up when invited over for a meal at the week-end, and when they notice that, at their best friend's place, there are always less chairs than guests at parties. Gemma recalls a comic and revealing episode of such a misencounter, on the occasion of a New Years' eve party at the home of a local friend:

And we went for New Year's eve last year, and Frédéric had some foie gras and ... when we arrived it was a real, like, everybody standing up drinking and eating bits off the table, and there was a main dish, there was a curry cooking that Dan had done, but everyone was just helping themselves, and I think Frédéric had had the idea that we were going to have a proper sit down meal and there were only going to be six or eight of us and it just wasn't like that at all, so it was completely different expectations of the same event and it was a bit disappointing wasn't it? I remember you were thinking oh I don't want to get out the foie gras now if everyone's just sitting around and they're all a bit drunk already anyway.

Frédéric is not uncritical of food rituals in France, especially among his own family. He refers to wine as being of great help in French family gatherings for coping with sitting at the table

for such long hours. He also does not necessarily object to his new English friends' way of hosting. But the confrontation between the piece of foie gras, carrier of a remembered order of sociability, and the order governed by the table in the new circle reveals the gap between two sets of conventions. His own tuning to the French sociability order is revived by the discordant imagining of foie gras on a very informal buffet table.

Here again 'habit memory' is triggered, the unease and feeling of trespassing are indicative of the hold of the respective orders and their conventions (whether of formality or informality) over space and bodies. Memories are all the stronger in a situation where direct comparison has, so to speak, been engineered, but habit memory is likely to be triggered in many situations of sociability, if not as directly. As with diets and timings, habit memory is triggered differentially, through the presence of a food item characteristic of the former order of sociability in the new one.

Overall, despite the on-going diversification and informalisation of eating together (Julier 2013), the centrality of the table in France, across all commensal occasions, and its differential use in England seems to be associated with enduring embodied habits and dispositions. As with the temporal order of meals, the order of sociability seems to govern 'solid patrimonies' of incorporated habits rather than split ones.

Yet, as with time schedules, there are also examples of latent dispositions being kindled by new arrangements in the new country of residence. A telling example is Marie, who came from a traditional French bourgeois family where family dinners were a rather codified and hierarchical affair, and who had seen her mother cook two full three-course meals a day all her life. She remembers her own difficulties as a student, when she left the family home and had to sit at a table with other students and friends: 'Eating with others, the relation to the table, it wasn't easy to start with... as we always used to eat as a family... Eating with others, I always felt embarrassed, very embarrassed'. Ill-prepared for companionship over a shared meal, she nevertheless had had that longing as a child ('I wanted to go to the canteen'). The

all-encompassing centrality of the order of the table in her family made it very difficult for her to conceive of a more relaxed sociability at the table: the rule calls for the exception, but this is not forthcoming, or only painfully so. By contrast, the English custom of going to the pub after work suits her perfectly. She and Simon went every day when they lived in England (which is where they met), and both miss that routine now that they are living in France. In the very 'sticky' order of sociability as in the temporal order of meals, individual adjustment to new arrangements sometimes tunes in latent dispositions which lacked an outlet in the previous environment.

4 Conclusion

In this paper we have considered some cases of adjustment in unfamiliar environments. Reactions to a disruptive double shift – a major life course move of setting up home with a new partner plus a re-location for one partner in a foreign country – reveal some of the mechanisms which operate to steer behaviour over time and which account for long term and joint transformation and stabilisation of eating patterns. Transitions which individuals find worthy of note, whether difficult or pleasurable, are interesting social scientifically for several reasons, including insights into the evolution and mutation of arrangements, clues to barriers to change, and a better understanding of structuring aspects of eating. They also suggest what might be different between the food conventions and institutions of two societies. Thus interviewees were glad to leave behind some aspects of the culinary arrangements of their country of origin. The English expressed satisfaction in the place given to meals in everyday life and sociability in France. The French in England expressed relief from sometimes oppressive formality. More instructive were the difficulties and discomforts reported. The uniformity of the ordered distribution of meals in France proved difficult for our English respondents. The French particularly missed meals at lunch time, typically eaten with colleagues. But maybe the biggest problems of adjustment for the migrant involved the rituals

of the commensal meals. French lunches with in-laws were most difficult for the English, while for the French coping with deviations from the template of the integrated meal, tarnished by the prevalence of drinks over food and the lack of conversation while sitting down to food, caused longing for past ways. While couples, despite the constraints of societal schedules, have some control over private household arrangements, on social occasions the power of the external environment and of the social circle is overwhelming.

More theoretically, we began this paper with a definition of habit as patterning of embodied experience that forms the more or less flexible ‘stuff’ of social practices, orders and conventions. Drawing on Connerton (1989) and Kaufmann (1994), we posited that habits connect social patterns, conventions and orders with everyday experience. We sought to understand how habits are scripted in three different orders of everyday life, governing diets, meal times and extra-domestic commensality. Dietary orders script habits in varied and relatively labile ways. The temporal and sociability orders appear geared to much firmer principles, governing performances in a more unified and ‘sticky’ way, and scripting more ‘solid’ incorporated habits. This is true in both countries, whether the key principles are the centrality of meal times and the table, as in France, or their subjection to the rhythms of work and leisure in England. These orders are at their most prevalent in families with school-age children, when it becomes difficult not to submit to the collective time organisation of the country of residence and the commensal and ritualised events with parents-in-law.

Adjustment to new sets of conventions is often facilitated through mutual compromise in the commensal pact, especially regarding shared diet and shared meal times. However, some aspects of the commensal pact (time schedules with school-aged children; commensality with parents in law) do not lend themselves easily to compromise. In such cases Kaufmann’s analysis of latent dispositions seems pertinent. Our respondents found resources from their past - partly frustrated dispositions and aspirations - when adjusting to a new companion and a new environment, permitting them to frame their new behaviours as latent dispositions, thus

revealing oneself to oneself anew, so to speak. We thus witnessed manifold illustrations of the 'Pygmalion effect', described by Kaufmann as a process at work in all couples. The same process applies to the encounter with a different set of conventions, practices and relations on the occasion of migration. Migrant partners especially, when seeking to make sense of their new habits and to find consistency in their everyday lives, conceived their newly acquired habits, particularly their temporal habits, as self-imposed rules in a personal project which they felt could only come to the fore in their new country of residence when supported by a new rhythm of everyday life.

Finally, we have extended Connerton's notion of habit memory by advancing the related notion of differential habit memory. Habit, for Connerton, is ingrained body interaction with objects which scripts social life in and through the body. Habit memory is the result of that process of inscription, materialised in postures and gestures. Such a notion works well to account for habit as the 'stuff' of convention and ritual, and in that context habit memory can hardly be distinguished from habit itself. But Kaufmann's inquiry into individual 'patrimones' of scripted habits highlighted the possibility of biographical and existential contradiction and conflict between sets of habits, which we have argued makes for a much more labile understanding.

Through the notion of 'differential' habit memory, we signal processes whereby memories are triggered not through repeated performance but instead through contrasts between past and current performance. In particular incongruities in performance (for example, light lunch and late dinner or foie gras on an informal table) conjure up in mind and body previous, more 'harmonious' or integrated performances associated with habits which cannot be actualised but nevertheless are very much present to the individual experiencing disjuncture. Differential habit memory also refers to the fact that habits may be scripted relationally, with everyday habits alternating with habits patterned as exception: thus not only is each repeated performance bodily inscribed but so is the contrast between them. The young French woman who contrasted dietary habit memories of convenience versus fresh food shows that the

relational scripting of habits can make change easier if variety of past experience can be mobilised. We regard the relational character of the inscription of habit in orders of everyday life and practices, and the resulting differential character of habit memory, as a promising hypothesis for further research, encouraging exploration of the relation between habit and change and the paradoxically agentic character of habit (Ilmonen 2001).

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¹ Kaufmann uses this concept to designate an attitude of partners in some couples, who transform former 'dormant' resources of their partners into 'capital', and thereby act as Pygmalion with his Galatea.

² It proved especially difficult to recruit couples with French men in England.

³ In this respect again our France-based and England-based contingents are not strictly comparable, since for the moment only one of the couples interviewed in England had children.

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⁵ Kaufmann coined the 'patrimony' of incorporated habits after Alfred Schutz's notion of 'stock of [accumulated] experience' (1994: 306). Kaufmann's use of the notion of patrimony is somewhat counter-intuitive, as contrary to the solidity of possession which it normally evokes he considers that it can be marked by contradiction ('split' patrimony).

⁶ Raclette is a popular Swiss dish of melted (Raclette) cheese on boiled potatoes which requires guests to melt their own cheese portions in a small pan left heating in an electric round oven placed at the centre of the table.